



Meta Mhlarhi

Co-Founder | Executive Director

# Q&A

**Q** What led you to pursue a career in Private Equity?

**A** I am deeply passionate about Private Equity's pivotal role in infrastructure development, where strategic investments can significantly improve individuals' quality of life by enhancing access to energy. This improvement can, in turn, lead to better education, healthcare, and essential services. Through these ventures, I aim to contribute to a positive societal impact and transform the economy of South Africa.

At Mahlako, we embrace core values of sustainability, innovation, and empowerment. We believe in balanced growth – recognising that to nurture progress in any one area, all aspects must flourish. This ethos guides our journey towards creating a lasting impact in both the private equity arena and the communities we serve.

This vision led me to co-found the Mahlako Energy Fund. Our mission was clear: to address the capital shortages in black communities, combat South Africa's energy crisis, promote women's participation, and leverage investment funds to address infrastructure challenges across Africa.

Our journey began with the humble goal of raising a R500 million fund. However, through perseverance and dedication, we surpassed expectations and successfully raised R2 billion. This accomplishment has established us as the largest women-owned private equity fund in South Africa.

We are thrilled to announce the launch of a new fund, which will place even greater emphasis on infrastructure investments aimed at making a positive impact on people's lives. This initiative underscores our commitment not only to financial success, but also to driving meaningful societal change through strategic investments.

**Q** What, in your opinion, is the hardest part of a PE deal?

**A** Contracting is a pivotal stage, where the fine balance between risk and reward is intricately negotiated and structured. This phase necessitates a meticulous evaluation of various risks, including market volatility, operational complexities, regulatory changes,

and unforeseen external factors. Each risk must be comprehensively assessed and mitigated to protect the interests of both investors and the firm.

Downside protection is crucial during this process. It involves implementing strategies to minimise potential losses and manage risks effectively, while striving to maximise profitability. Achieving this balance requires a profound understanding of market dynamics, rigorous risk assessment capabilities, and exceptional negotiation skills.

In essence, successful contracting in Private Equity relies on the ability to balance risk management with the pursuit of substantial returns. This complex task demands meticulous attention to detail and a strategic approach to navigating the intricacies of investment agreements. By prioritising downside protection, driving returns, and managing risks prudently, Private Equity professionals can optimise outcomes and ensure the long-term success of their investments.

**Q** If you could change one thing on your career path to date, what would it be and why?

**A** If I could change one aspect of my career journey, it would be to cultivate a better balance in how I treat myself. While it is essential to take my career seriously and maintain a high level of accountability, I have come to understand the profound importance of being more forgiving of my own mistakes and setbacks. In fields like Private Equity, where the demand for excellence is relentless, it is easy to fall into the trap of excessive self-criticism when things do not go as planned. Reflecting on failures is vital for growth, yet I believe that embracing a more compassionate mindset towards myself would create a healthier environment for both personal and professional development. This shift would enable me to rebound more resiliently from challenges, while upholding high standards and supporting myself throughout every phase of my career journey.

**Q** What piece of advice would you give a female entrepreneur looking for funding?

**A** **Know Your Story:** Before approaching investors, thoroughly research and

understand your business, inside out. Be clear about your business model, market opportunity, financial projections, and most importantly, your unique story.

**Network Strategically:** Building relationships in the entrepreneurial ecosystem is crucial. Attend industry events, join networking groups, and connect with other entrepreneurs and investors. Networking not only opens doors for potential funding, but also provides valuable insights and mentorship.

**Find the Right Partners:** Collaborate with partners who complement your skills and bring diverse capabilities to the table.

**Emotional Intelligence:** Tailor your pitch to resonate with your audience. Understand what motivates investors, and align your story and numbers to address their interests and concerns.

**Q** Did you have a mentor and, if so, what was the most important thing you learnt from them?

**A** I have been privileged to be inspired by several remarkable role models who have significantly shaped my personal and professional journey. My parents, with their emphasis on networking and perseverance, provided unwavering support that has been a cornerstone for overcoming challenges and finding solutions.

My sister, a beacon of inspiration and now a valued business partner, enriches my life daily with her passion for reading and profound life insights. Together, we harness her wisdom and our shared values to navigate our business journey with success and integrity.

Furthermore, individuals like Futhi Mtoba, Lwazi Bam, and Tryphosa Ramano have exemplified remarkable resilience and determination in their fields, serving as powerful sources of inspiration.

Moreover, my partner Sydney Mhlarhi's exceptional business acumen and innovative management approach continuously motivates me to strive for excellence in all my endeavours. The collective influence of these extraordinary individuals has profoundly enriched my professional growth and aspirations.